

Message Text

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FOLLOWING REPEAT SUVA 1126 ACTION SECSTATE INFO CANBERRA,
WELLINGTON, PORT MORESBY, MOSCOW, PEKING, AND HONOLULU DATED
JUNE 30, 1978.

QUOTE: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE SUVA 1126

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PDIP, FJ, UR

SUBJECT: RATU MARA SPEAKS OUT AGAINST TIES WITH USSR

REF: A) SUVA 1113 (NOTAL), B) SUVA 1114 (NOTAL)

1. IN JUNE 27 PRESS CONFERENCE, THE FIRST SINCE HIS VISIT TO
KOREA AND PRC, FIJI PRIME MINISTER RATU MARA CRITICIZED THE USSR,
STATING "I THINK THEIR OBJECTIVE IS TO UPSET ME AND GET ME OUT
OF GOVERNMENT", AND REITERATED HIS OPPOSITION TO ESTABLISHMENT
OF A SOVIET EMBASSY HERE. RATU MARA ALLEGED THAT SOVIETS HAVE
OFFERED EDUCATIONAL GRANTS FOR STUDY IN MOSCOW TO PERSONS IN
THE OPPOSITION CAMP WITHOUT FIRST CONSULTING THE GOF.
HE SAID HE HAD SEVERAL YEARS AGO OBJECTED TO THIS PRACTICE IN
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CONVERSATION WITH SOVIET AMBASSADOR TO NEW ZEALAND, BUT
HIS OBJECTIONS HAD GONE UNHEEDED. RATU MARA ALSO NOTED THAT
CHINESE HAD WARNED AGAINST SOVIET INTRUSION INTO THE
SOUTH PACIFIC AND HAD SUGGESTED TO HIM THAT "IT WOULD BE BETTER
TO BE FRIENDLY WITH THE AMERICANS THAN WITH THE RUSSIANS."
(SEE REFTELS FOR LOCAL PRESS COVERAGE.)

2. REPORT OF RATU MARA'S REMARKS PROMPTED REJOINDER FROM SOVIET EMBASSY CANBERRA WHICH, ACCORDING TO PRESS, DENIED THE USSR'S EVER TAKING SIDES AGAINST LEGITIMATE GOVERNMENTS IN OTHER COUNTRIES AND CALLED THE PRIME MINISTER'S FEARS GROUNDLESS. SOVIET EMBASSY OFFICIAL REPORTEDLY SAID RATU MARA HAD BEEN TOO IMPRESSED BY CHINESE ANTI-SOVIET ATTITUDES AND ADDED, "THE ONLY SIGN OF ANY INTEREST IN FIJI BY THE SOVIET UNION WAS A VISIT BY THE AMBASSADOR, MR. A.V. BASOV, RECENTLY." (NOTE: AS PREVIOUSLY REPORTED, AMB. BASOV'S ATTEMPTS TO MEET WITH RATU MARA ON THAT OCCASION WERE UNSUCCESSFUL.)

3. COMMENT: RATU MARA'S REMARKS REFLECT A LONG-HELD DISTRUST OF THE USSR AND SOVIET INTENTIONS IN THE PACIFIC. CHINA TRIP MAY HAVE REINFORCED HIS ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE USSR, BUT SHOULD NOT BE SEEN AS THEIR IMPETUS. RATU MARA'S PERSONALIZATION OF THE SOVIET THREAT, HOWEVER, HAS BEEN CONSIDERED LOCALLY TO BE A RATHER OVER-DRAWN REACTION, AND THE PRIME MINISTER'S ACCUSATION THAT USSR IS CULTIVATING HIS POLITICAL OPPOSITION APPEARS TO BE AN UNNECESSARY PROVOCATION OF FIJI'S INDIAN PARTIES, PARTICULARLY WHEN VIEWED IN THE CONTEXT OF THE SOMEWHAT DELICATE RACIAL BALANCE HERE.
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